

Practicing Gender, Queering Theory

--If at first you don't succeed, failure may be your style. – Quentin Crisp¹

The 'turn to practice' both in IR theory and in sociological theory is meant as a correction to what is perceived as an overly linguistic conception of culture and discourse in social theory, lacking attention to patterned embodied actions.² The call to take seriously what actors actually *do* is crucial, and is represented in a number of important recent critical interventions in IR theory.³ In terms of feminist international relations, focusing on practices as they have been understood in recent IR scholarship lack revelatory force: as Jabri (2013) points out, feminists such as Tickner (2006), Enloe (1989, 2001), and Moon (1997) have long focused on lived experience and have rewritten international relations in terms of everyday, intimate relations that are structured by, and reproduce, gendered social relations. To this list we could also add Zarkov (2007), Khalili (2011), Sylvester (2012), Daigle (2015), Wilcox (2015), among others, reinforcing Eric Ringmar's recent suggestion

¹ Quentin Crisp, *The Naked Civil Servant*. (New York: Plume, 1968), p. 196. Also quoted by Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 96.

² See, *inter alia*, Iver B. Neumann, 'Returning Practice to the Linguistic Turn: The Case of Diplomacy,' *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 31:3 (2002) pp. 627-651; Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Vincent Pouliot, 'The Logic of Practicality: A Theory of Practice of Security Communities,' *International Organization* 62:2 (2008), pp. 257-88; Ted Hopf, 'The Logic of Habit in International Relations,' *European Journal of International Relations* 16:4 (2010), pp. 539-61; Vincent Pouliot, *International Security in Practice: The Politics of NATO-Russia Diplomacy*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Didier Bigo, 'Pierre Bourdieu and International Relations: Power of Practices, Practices of Power,' *International Political Sociology* 5 (2011), pp. 225-258. Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot, 'International Practices,' *International Theory* 3:1 (2011a), pp. 1-36; Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot, eds. *International Practices*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011b); Anna Leander, 'The Promises, Problems, and Potentials of a Bourdieu-Inspired Staging of International Relations,' *International Political Sociology* 5 (2011), pp. 294-131; Damiano De Felice and Francesco Obino, 'Editors' Introduction: Weaving the Theories and Practices of International Relations' *Millennium—Journal of International Studies*. 40:3 (2012) pp. 431-437; Inanna Hamati-Ataya, 'IR Theory as International Practice/Agency: A Clinical-Cynical Bourdieusian Perspective,' *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 40:3 (2012), pp. 625-646. Eric Ringmar, 'The Search for Dialogue as a Hindrance to Understanding: Practices as Inter-Paradigmatic Research Program,' *International Theory* 6:1 (2014), pp. 1-27; Christian Bueger, 'Pathways to Practice: Praxiography and International Politics,' *European Political Science Review* 6:3 (2014), pp. 383-406; Christian Bueger and Frank Gadinger, 'The Play of International Practice,' *International Studies Quarterly* 59:3 (2015), pp. 449-60; Sebastian Schindler and Tobias Wille, 'Change In and Through Practice; Pierre Bourdieu, Vincent Pouliot, and the End of the Cold War,' *International Theory* 7:3 (2015), pp. 330-359; Kavi Joseph Abraham, and Yehonatan Abramson, 'A Pragmatist Vocation for International Relations: The (Global) Public and Its Problems,' *European Journal of International Relations* (2015).

³ Christine Sylvester, 'War Experiences/War Practices/War Theory,' *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 40:3 (2012), pp. 483-503.

that there is nothing truly new about the study of practices in International Relations (2014), at least as it pertains to feminist work.

Work self-consciously contributing to the ‘practice turn’ in International Relations theory has by and large neglected this vast literature on gender and social practices. This matters beyond the also-important question of gendered reading and citational practices in IR and political science more broadly that neglect women’s work and feminist/queer scholarship.⁴ Despite being one of the most cited social theorists of all time (Smith and Lee 2014), Judith Butler and her work on performativity and gender usually merit a footnote or very brief mention in key works constituting the practice turn if mentioned at all.⁵ This is in contrast to the pantheon of (overwhelmingly male-identified) social theorists such as Bourdieu, Goffman, Latour, de Certeau, Peirce, James, Dewey, and Weber, cited by diverse scholars as inspirations for the ‘practice turn’ writ large. Practice theory may constitute the “big picture” of IR⁶ or a “diverse family”⁷ but is it apparently not large or diverse enough for feminist and/or queer approaches.

Is there a ‘constitutive failure’ that practice theory must not be feminist? Or are they more compatible?

Perhaps this neglect is due to the association of Butler’s work with feminist and queer theory, which are often taken as niche areas of IR theory rather than issue that concern the practice

⁴ See Christine Sylvester, ‘Anatomy of a Footnote,’ *Security Dialogue* 38:4 (2007), pp. 547-558; Daniel Maliniak, Ryan Powers, and Barbara F. Walter, ‘The Gender Citation Gap in International Relations,’ *International Organization* 67: (2013), pp. 889-922; Nicola J. Smith and Donna Lee, ‘What’s Queer about Political Science,’ *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 17:1 (2014), pp. 49-63.

⁵ Such as in Bueger and Gadinger (2015); Adler and Pouliot (2011a, 2011b); Leander (2011); and Bigo (2011). Exceptions that contain somewhat longer discussions of Butler’s work include Roxanne Doty, ‘Aporia: A Critical Exploration of the Agent-Structure Problematique in International Relations Theory,’ *European Journal of International Relations* 3:3 (1997), pp. 365-392, (a piece retrospectively interpolated into the canon of ‘the practice turn’), Raymond Duvall and Arjun Chowdhury, ‘Practices of Theory,’ in Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot (eds.) *International Practices*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 335-354, and discussed as an important caveat to practice in Hopf (2010).

⁶ Adler and Pouliot (2011a), p. 1.

⁷ Bueger and Gadinger (2015), p. 2.

of IR theory as a whole. However, Butler's work is arguably not only deeply political in her theorization of subjects of gender and desire, but of great significance for theorizing practices and the embodied subject more broadly.⁸ Rather than seeing a divide between earlier 'textualist' work that later develops into a theory of practice⁹ which aligns Butler's work with 'ideational' theories that practice turn theorists attempt to overcome, there is a great deal of theoretical continuity in Butler's theorization of the political subject and its relationship to what she calls the performative, and therefore to practice. Butler's project, from her early work on Beauvoir and "becoming a body"¹⁰ to the materialization of embodiment as related to gender performativity¹¹ and her more recent work that addresses more explicitly political questions of war and violence¹² as well as the performative affects of bodies assembling in the public sphere (Butler 2015), has addressed the conditions that create and sustain 'livable lives,' or subjects recognizable as such. Butler's work is not only important to consider in reference to IR's practice turn because Butler is one of the foremost feminist/queer theorists of the past several decades. Even more importantly, her work entails a distinctive approach toward power, practice, embodiment and 'the subject,' that makes questions of gender and desire central to the question of what it means to become a subject in the first place. As such, what follows is less the addition of a 'feminist' or 'gender' element or variable to 'the practice turn' as it is

⁸ For overviews of Judith Butler's contribution to political theory and International Relations, see Cynthia Weber, 'Performative States,' *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 27:1 (1998a) 77-95. Lene Hansen, 'The Little Mermaid's Silent Security Dilemma and the Absence of Gender in the Copenhagen School,' *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 29:2 (2000), pp. 285-306; Moya Lloyd, *Judith Butler: From Norms to Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007); Samuel Chambers and Terrell Carver, *Judith Butler and Political Theory: Troubling Politics* (New York and London: Routledge, 2008); Smith and Lee (2014); Lauren Wilcox, *Bodies of Violence: Theorizing Embodied Subjects in International Relations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁹ cf. Bueger and Gadinger (2015), p. 6.

¹⁰ Judith Butler, 'Gendering the Body: Beauvoir's Philosophical Contribution,' in Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall, (eds) *Women, Knowledge, Reality*, (Winchester, MA: Unwin Hyman, Inc, 1989), pp. 253-262.

¹¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (New York: Routledge, 1999 [1990]), Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York: Routledge, 1993)

¹² Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004) and *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009)

currently practiced in IR¹³ than a feminist/queer theory inspired “insurrection on the level of ontology” (Butler 2004a:33) that questions whose lives are real and how reality is made, as well as how ‘practice theory’ is made in International Relations. As approaches to feminist and queer theory are diverse, I do not purport to offer a definitive “feminist/queer theory of practice,” rather to explore the implications of taking Butler’s work seriously for the practice turn as *an* approach to writing embodied practices in IR.

I argue that ‘the practice turn’ through feminist/queer contributions toward theorizing the practice of gender points us the need to theorize the stakes of failure and incompetence.¹⁴ In the discussion of performativity, specifically in relation to Judith Butler’s work, I argue that performativity simultaneously involves enacting norms and the possibility of disrupting norms of gender and desire. Understanding performativity as the practice of gender involves clarifying the role of intelligibility and repetition in Butler’s work, concepts which make clear the stakes of theorizing ‘failure,’ as Butler and other queer theorists have done. I argue the practice turn has tended to focus on *competent* practices, ignoring and obscuring acts and bodies deemed ‘failures’ at the expense of a richer appreciation of the relevance of certain practices in international political life. In fact, bodily styles that ‘fail’ (as in the epigraph by Quentin Crisp) may turn out to be more interesting than those that succeed. I discuss an example of a gender ‘failure’ in the experiences of trans- and gender non-conforming practices of gender in airport security practices, an area of increasing critical interest in

¹³ For critiques of adding ‘gender’ or ‘sexuality’ variables in IR, see Cynthia Weber, ‘What’s so queer about IR? Or beware the sexuality variable,’ *Millennium Conference*, ‘Gender and International Studies: Looking Forward’ LSE, 13-14 September (1998b) and Cynthia Weber, ‘Queer Intellectual Curiosity as International Relations Method: Developing Queer International Relations Theoretical and Methodological Frameworks,’ *International Studies Quarterly*. (2015b); Terrell Carver, Molly Cochran and Judith Squires, ‘Gendering Jones: Feminisms, IRs, Masculinities,’ *Review of International Studies* 24:2 (1998), pp. 283-297; Charlotte Hooper, ‘Masculinities, IR and the ‘Gender Variable’: A Cost-Benefit Analysis for (Sympathetic) Gender Skeptics,’ *Review of International Studies* 25: (1999), pp. 475-491.

¹⁴ Following Susan Stryker, Paisley Currah, and Lisa Jean Moore, ‘Introduction: Trans-, Trans, or Transgender?’ *WSQ: Women’s Studies Quarterly* 36: 3-4 (2008), pp. 11-22 and Laura J. Shepherd and Laura Sjöberg, ‘Trans- Bodies In/of War(s): Cisprivilege and Contemporary Security Strategy,’ *Feminist Review* 101: 1 (2012) pp. 5-23, I use ‘trans-’ rather than ‘transsexual’ or ‘transgender’ because it leaves open the question of what suffix follows and suggests an adjective rather than a noun in order to prevent the stabilization of some people as concrete beings and others as ‘crossers’.

International Relations, to show the stakes of focusing on ‘competent’ practices as well as a means by which to complicate the way in which gender as well as success and failure are understood in binary terms. I conclude by questioning the terms by which ‘practice turn’ scholars establish their own competence in the field of IR in terms of neglect/homogenization of feminist/queer approaches.

I. The Practice of Gender

What is at stake in taking gender as a practice seriously? Importantly, if gender is considered a practice, it is a practice in which the ‘participants’ are understood not as a select few who have been taught or initiated into a field of practice, but can be said to constitute all of humanity. The rules for gender differ across time, space, and social location, but it is a consistent feature of social life around the world and is also deeply connected to questions of embodiment. Butler’s famous concept of performativity describes the construction of identity as a practice. Butler writes, “[g]ender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeals over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being.”¹⁵ Practice turn theorists similarly emphasize the body as the site through which practices are performed. Adler and Pouliot, for example argue that practice is form of embodied action that “rests on *background knowledge*, which it embodies, enacts, and reifies all at once”.¹⁶ Bueger and Gadinger insist a core commitment of practice theorists is that “bodies are the main carrier of practices.”¹⁷ Gender as a “repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts” certainly would appear to align Butler’s theory of gender with much of the work of the practice turn in its emphasis on habituated practices of the body. However, to understand the different dynamics between inside and outside

¹⁵ Butler (1999 [1990]), p. 33. Butler is not the only social and/or feminist theorist to make this point about gender as a practice. See also Candice West Candice and Don H. Zimmerman, ‘Doing Gender,’ *Gender and Society* 1: (1987), pp. 125-151; R.W. Connell, *Masculinities*. (Cambridge UK: Polity Press, 1995), p. 65, for example.

¹⁶ Adler and Pouliot (2011b), p. 8, emphasis in original.

¹⁷ Bueger and Gadinger (2015), p. 5

that are (re)produced through practice between Butler's theory and the way practice is generally theorized in IR requires greater explication of gender practice in terms of intelligibility and repetition.

Butler's concept of performativity is regularly misread in two contradictory, yet telling, ways that are useful for explicating its uniqueness. Butler's performative theory of gender has frequently been critiqued as overly individualist and agentic by those who read her as if she is suggesting practicing gender is no more difficult than changing clothes,¹⁸ while at the same time is also considered by others to be too structural and determinist. For Butler, the concept of performativity encompasses both the norms that structure intelligible genders as well as the bodily practices that enact gender in ways that are inseparable: "performativity describes both the processes of being acted on and the conditions and possibilities for acting and that we cannot understand its operation without both of these dimensions."¹⁹

The concept of intelligibility is crucial for understanding how Butler's work departs from an individualist or voluntarist frame. The performativity of gender in Butler's work has always been situated within "a highly rigid regulatory frame".²⁰ "[Gender] is a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint."²¹ For Butler, what *appears* to be a self-authored practice of gender can only be practiced in reference to social norms and meanings that have no single author. While practices of gender are diverse, Butler emphasizes the role of intelligibility for denoting a gender practice as a

¹⁸ Two leading proponents of practice theory in IR reference Butler's work in this manner, which is consistent with Bourdieu's somewhat misleading reading of Butler's work, particularly from *Masculine Domination*: Bigo (2011) and Leander (2011). In Bourdieu's view, genders are inscribed on bodies against a gendered social structure and are not "simple roles that can be played at will (in the manner of drag queens)" and because genders "do not spring from a simple effect of verbal naming" they "cannot be abolished by an act of performative magic." Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*. Trans. Richard Nice. (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2002 [1998]), p. 103.

¹⁹ Butler (2015), p. 63

²⁰ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999 [1990]), p. 33

²¹ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: London: Routledge, 2004b) p. 1

success or failure, with the stakes being one's ability to be recognized as a subject. "Gender... figures as a precondition for the production and maintenance of legible humanity."²² Because one's intelligibility as a subject requires a certain kind of performance, it is less a choice than a compulsory practice and citation of a norm.²³

The terms of intelligibility, especially in Butler's early work, are norms of sex and gender, particularly of heterosexuality. Norms of heterosexuality stabilize the apparent naturalness of sex, gender and sexuality through a "grid of intelligibility" that creates the limits of which 'practitioners' are to appear as proper 'practitioners,' that is, subjects. Butler writes, "Intelligible genders are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire".²⁴ Heteronormativity is premised on the belief that males are supposed to act masculine and desire females, and females are supposed to act feminine and desire men. If sex, gender, sexual practice and desire do not line up the way in which the heterosexual matrix demands, the subject will be unintelligible, not fully human. Any 'break' between biological sex, gender performance and desire is foreclosed as non-normative and 'unreal'. Certain ways of being cannot exist if gender doesn't follow from sex or desire from sex or gender.²⁵ Thus, practicing gender in some relationship to these norms of sex and gender is unavoidable, because we do not create the normative context in which we find ourselves.

²² Butler (2004b), p11

²³ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993) pp. 231

²⁴ Butler (1990), p. 17

²⁵ Butler (1999 [1990]), p. 17. Queer theorists have also critiqued binaries of homosexual/heterosexual or gender non-conforming/gender normative as being insufficiently attuned to the multiple and complex sites of inclusion and exclusion. 'Homonormative' theories critique the tendency of activism on behalf of gender and sexual minorities to focus on issues such as marriage equality and the right to serve in militaries as striving to assimilate to the norms of broader heterosexist society, which primarily benefits white, middle to upper class men, to the detriment of women, people of color, and trans- people, and also seek to align progressive policies in relation to gay, lesbian, bi and trans-communities with greater 'civilizational' status in relation especially to African and Middle Eastern peoples. See also Lauren Wilcox, 'Queer Theory and the 'Proper Objects' of International Relations,' *International Studies Review* 16:4 (2014), pp. 612–15; Jasbir K Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014).

Gendering, for Butler, is a process of becoming a body that is signifiable to others. Norms of sex and gender matter, because they foreclose, often violently, the kind of lives that are livable. Butler refers to the violence of foreclosing possibilities for livable lives as ‘normative violence’. “To the extent that gender norms...establish what will and will not be intelligibly human, what will and will not be considered to be “real,” they establish the ontological field in which bodies may be given legitimate expression”²⁶ This is the key point at which Butler’s work can be read as not only about practices of gender and sexuality, but also, as she clarifies in her 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble*, as a political intervention aimed questioning the terms of livability in a context in which so many lives have been deemed unreal, and, in the face of their violent demise, ungrievable.²⁷ Butler argues that before a subject can lead a ‘livable life’ they have to be recognized as viable subject. Norms of sex, gender and sexuality define which bodies will be ‘culturally intelligible’; lives that do conform to these norms will be unrecognizable, illegitimate, and unreal; they will not ‘matter’. Butler makes the point that this critique does not only extend to norms of sex and gender, but to “all kinds of bodies whose lives are not considered to be ‘lives’ and whose materiality is not understood to ‘matter’”.²⁸

Thus, a key distinction between practice theory as it has been discussed in IR and Butler’s feminist theorization of gender as a practice is that gender is not practiced by a pre-given subject, rather, gender *constitutes* subjects. Butler asks, “to what extent does the body *come into being* in and

²⁶ Butler (1999 [1990]), p. xxiii

²⁷ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004a)

²⁸ Judith Butler, ‘How Bodies Come to Matter: An Interview with Judith Butler,’ *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 23:2 (1998b), p. 281. In recent years, a social movement in the US against the unjust and unpunished police killings of black people known as “Black Lives Matter” (a phrase first used by an American queer black woman activist, Patrisse Cullors who co-founded the Black Lives Matter movement with Alicia Garza and Opal Tometi) asserts the ‘mattering’ of lives that are treated with violence, brutality, and neglect. While the question of race is not central to Butler’s work in the way that gender and sexuality is, in *Bodies that Matter* and in other works Butler’s analysis leads her away from the theoretical prioritization of sexuality and gender to more complicated maps of power and embodied practices that note the importance of race in structuring gender and sexuality, noting for example that “heterosexuality does not have a monopoly on exclusionary logics” in Butler (1993), p. 112. See also Butler (2009; 2015) and Sara Salih, *Judith Butler* (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 92-95.

through the mark(s) of gender?”²⁹ The distinction between performance and performativity, for Butler, is that performances are actions undertaken by a pre-given subject, while the performative contests the notion of a subject outside of the practice itself. One becomes a subject through literally becoming *embodied*, that is, inhabiting a body that is recognizable according to some normative standards. Gender, for Butler is less about embodying a practice, than a *practice of embodiment*; that is, becoming a body that is recognizable.

Because of the role of gender in constituting subjects *qua* subjects, gender is a practice that is differentiated from much of the work of the practice turn in IR that focuses on limited groups or communities with specialized knowledge. The emphasis of many “practice turn” works on the practices of diplomats and/or bureaucrats in international organizations³⁰ emphasizes the relative autonomy of different “communities of practice,” as well as reinforcing existing definitions about the proper objects of IR theorizing.³¹ Adler writes, “Membership in communities of practice also constitutes identity ‘through the forms of competence it entails’ where competence refers to practice performance”.³² Another example is Andersen and Neumann’s model of practices consists of “letting the participants in a practice specify what the practice consists of”³³ including the use of the participant’s own concepts. The use of the term ‘participants’ here suggests that there are also non-participants in this particular practice. Gender is thus a different *kind* of practice: while there are certainly specific “communities of practice” in which the norms for practices related to gender and sexuality differ, the practice of gender more generally is not confined to specific groups. Gender is a

²⁹ Butler (1999 [1990]), p. 8

³⁰ Pouliot (2008, 2010); Iver Neuman and Ole Jacob Sending *Governing the Global Polity: Practice, Mentality, Rationality* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2010); Rebecca Adler-Nissen, *Opting Out of the European Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014)

³¹ Cynthia Weber, ‘Why is there no Queer International Theory?’ *European Journal of International Relations*. 21:1 (2015a), pp. 27-51.

³² Emanuel Adler, ‘The Spread of Security Communities,’ *European Journal of International Relations* 14:2 (2008), p. 201 citing Wenger (1998a:152).

³³ Anderson and Neumann, (2012), p. 470

“constitutive constraint” of being a subject; as “bodies only appear, only live within the productive constraints of certain highly gendered regularly schemas”.³⁴ Whether or not one is recognizably practicing a gender or not, for Butler, bodily life entails a relationship with norms, particularly norms of gender and sexuality.

While Butler’s theory of gender as performative emphasizes the normative background that shapes what kinds of gender practices are intelligible, her concept of performativity also cannot be reduced to habituation or to a role that constrains action, a problem that haunts some practice theory in IR (especially that influenced by Bourdieu).³⁵ For Butler, gender is something one *becomes*, but never fully *is*; as gender only exists through a repetition of acts, one can never fully or completely embody this norm. Here, we can also see echoes of Simone de Beauvoir’s famous statement that “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”.³⁶ Butler refers to gender as “a corporeal style” and gendered bodies as “styles of the flesh”.³⁷ Bodies come to be intelligible through the embodying of norms, through literally ‘acting them out’ in the body through repetitive practices. Such a bodily style refers not to a single foundational act, but crucially, the repetition of such acts, and Butler also elides any distinction between the performativity of language and of bodily acts. Butler writes, “performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration”.³⁸

The issue of repetition is so important to performativity because practices are not sovereign in their ability to create or reproduce meanings. This is why Doty’s frequently cited point about the

³⁴ Butler, (1993), p. xi

³⁵ For more on the distinction between Butler’s concept of performativity and habituation see Hopf (2010).

³⁶ Butler (1989).

³⁷ Butler, (1999 [1990]), p. 177

³⁸ 2011b:7).

indeterminacy of the “play of practice” is so crucial, yet so often misunderstood by practice theorists who cite it.³⁹ It is not merely one of a list of disparate commitments that a flattened-out group of ‘practice theorists’ hold,⁴⁰ nor is it at all clear this commitment is held by all or most self-identified practice theorists. However, this point central to the very possibility of change which has been a sticking point for practice theorists in IR, as pointed out by Duvall and Chowdhury (2011), Ringmar (2014), and Schindler and Wille (2015), and a point of criticism for feminist scholars of Bourdieu as well.⁴¹ For Adler and Pouliot, while there may be some “wobble room” for agency, “the performance of practice goes with, and constitutes, the flow of history.”⁴² Neumann and Pouliot (2011), Pouliot (2010) and Schindler and Wille (2015) locate the possibility of change in *hysteresis* in which the habits and dispositions acquired in one *habitus* become ill-suited for the present conditions, as they are viewed by the actors themselves, denoting both a change in circumstances and/or a realization of the limitations of particular practices.

Butler’s concept of performativity has a distinctive approach to how change might be possible; a possibility itself related to failure. For Butler, drawing on Derrida, the possibility of subversion is embedded within language itself, and similarly, within the nature of meaning-making practices be they linguistic or otherwise bodily.⁴³ It is precisely within the speech-act itself (and as Butler has been quite clear on, other performatives such as bodily actions) that possesses the potential for speech acts to fail and thus expose the indeterminacy, instability and contingency of naturalized bodies.⁴⁴ It is not precisely ‘patterned’ which implies a copy of an original or at least a great deal of regularity. This is similar to Duvall and Chowdhury’s emphasis on “the possibility of

³⁹ Doty (1997).

⁴⁰ Cf, Bueger and Gadinger (2015)

⁴¹ see for example Jabri (2013)

⁴² Adler and Pouliot (2011b), p. 7

⁴³ Roxanne Doty’s poststructuralist reading of the agent-structure problem in International Relations makes a similar point in her insistence of the indeterminacy of ‘play’ to practices and how “practices overflow that which can be accounted for in purely structural or agentic terms” (1997) p. 377

⁴⁴ Butler (1997a)

polysemy is a structural necessity of practice,” since practice always take place within multiple and differentiated systems of meaning.⁴⁵ Butler writes, “If one ‘is’ woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pregendered ‘person’ transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities.”⁴⁶ As there are many ways in which gender might be practiced, the meaning of what a ‘competent’ practice entails is subject to revision and change.

The possibility of change exists because the body does not just “*enact* the past,” it is not simply the “sedimentation of speech acts by which it has been constituted.”⁴⁷ The body is in excess to the social demands placed upon it. Butler locates this excess, the way the body “remains uncontained by any of its acts of speech”⁴⁸ as what is missing from Bourdieu’s account of the bodily *habitus*. This is a key distinction between Butler’s work, and Bourdieu’s, who is more commonly cited as an influence among IR practice theorists yet is recognized as quite structuralist as his work mainly concerns the reproduction of social power through practices.⁴⁹ Bodies, as the site of the performance of practices, “never quite comply with the norms by which their materialization is compelled.”⁵⁰ This is precisely what opens the door to what can be called ‘queer’ in the sense that acts that may seem to comply with norms can have unintended consequences.⁵¹ Butler writes, capturing the dual sense of performativity, that “although gender norms precede us and act upon us

⁴⁵ Duvall and Chowdhury (2011) p. 345

⁴⁶ Butler (1990) p. 3. Some readers may recognize the repetition of this citation from Hansen (2000) p. 299 and Sylvester (2007), p. 553, two other pieces critiquing the exclusion of gender and feminist work from IR theories; in this case, from critical security studies.

⁴⁷ Butler (1997a), p. 155

⁴⁸ Butler (1997a), p. 55

⁴⁹ Schindler and Wille (2015); Adler-Nissen (2014), p. 59. Other ‘practice turn’ theorists cited are less structuralist than Bourdieu, such as de Certeau. [see Neumannn (2002)].

⁵⁰ Butler (1993), p.2

⁵¹ Sedgwick (1993), p. 8

(that is one sense of their enactment), we are obligated to reproduce them, and when we do begin, always unwittingly, to reproduce them, something may always go awry (and this is a second sense of their enactment)”.⁵²

This is closest to what Hansen identifies as a post-structuralist approach to practices that seeks to build a project around the question of whether a specific practice (perhaps this is similar to what Butler means by ‘performance’) mobilizes “general practices” which are perhaps akin to the way in which Butler speaks of norms. This gap can be understood in terms broader than practices of gender: “Even uncontested specific ‘routine’ practices are crucial to the reproduction of general practice and we should therefore keep the relationship between specific and general practice open and examine the (potential) gap between them”.⁵³ This gap between the specific and general is particularly important when considered gender from an intersectional standpoint: not only is gender practice that can be ‘failed’ at, but it also is never practiced in isolation of other embodied norms and practices.

Summarizing Butler’s theory of gender performativity in relation to ‘the practice turn’ in IR provides us with several insights to theorizing practices. First, practices of gender are unavoidable; everyone is practicing gender in a way that will be intelligible or not according to prevailing norms of sex and gender. This is directly related to the second point; that gender practices are not only given meaning by prior norms, but serve to create the basis for intelligible ‘livable lives’. The third point follows: gender only has meaning through its repeated practice, but it is not practiced the same way in every instance: gender as a practice is ‘queer,’ that is, unstable with gaps and tensions between

⁵² Butler (2015), p. 31

⁵³ Lene Hansen, ‘Performing Practices: A Poststructural Analysis of the Mohammad Cartoon Crisis,’ in Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot (eds) *International Practices*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 281

individual performances and the broader norm. The very instability of gender requires its reiteration through practice: this also implies the creation of ‘constitutive others’: those whose gender practices are unintelligible who also hold open the possibility for subversion and change in ways in which gender practices can be made intelligible.

II. Failure

Because gender practices are not only embodied, but come to determine who can be a proper subject in the first place, ‘succeeding’ at practices often goes unnoticed while failure can result in erasure and/or violence. Thus, taking Butler seriously as a theorist of ‘practice’ opens space for a more rigorous assessment of the stakes of success and failure in ‘the practice turn’. In the practice term literature in IR success and failure usually revolve around questions of competency. Much of the key literature in the practice turn makes the issue of ‘competence’ central, even constitutive, of what a ‘practice’ is. Adler and Pouliot insist that “practices are competent performances”⁵⁴ and that “practice is more or less *competent* in a socially meaningful and recognizable way.”⁵⁵ This is essential to how Adler and Pouliot understand practice because of the need for an audience to appraise the performance and its (in)competence. Similarly, Neumann defines practices as “socially recognized forms of activity, done on the basis of what members learn from others, and capable of being done well or badly, correctly or incorrectly.”⁵⁶ Janice Gross Stein’s argument is that standards of competency can be changed for communities of practice, such as aid communities in her example, when new problems arise that challenge existing knowledge.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Adler and Pouliot (2011b), p. 6

⁵⁵ Adler and Pouliot (2011b), p. 7

⁵⁶ (2002:630-631 citing Barnes 2001).

⁵⁷ Janice Gross Stein, ‘Background Knowledge in the Foreground: Conversations about Competent Practice in ‘Sacred Space’,’ in Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot (eds.), *International Practices*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 87-107. Erik Ringmar has also recently critiqued Adler and Pouliot for insisting upon the competency of practices as a way of distinguishing between practices and performances (2014). The distinction Ringmar makes between performances as intentional acts designed to be judged by an audience and practices that constitute everything that we

Butler's work is crucially instructive for debates on the practice turn in IR because of her emphasis on intelligibility and failure. The norms that constitute 'success' in a practice necessarily also constitute failure. Certain practices—certain bodies—are excluded from ontologically 'mattering' through the process of subject formation, though they haunt the subject by becoming its 'constitutive outside'.⁵⁸ Butler writes: "The normative force of performativity—its power to establish what qualifies as "being"—works not only through reiteration, but through exclusion as well. And in the case of bodies, those exclusions haunt signification as its abject borders or as that which is strictly foreclosed: the unlivable, the nonnarrativizable, the traumatic".⁵⁹ Here, the consequences of failure, or of being an incompetent practitioner of gender are made clear: one will fail to be intelligible as a human subject deserving of the same regard as more 'competent' actors. This is not so much a matter of a subject performing gender poorly, but of certain subjects not being recognized at all. One "exists not only by virtue of being recognized, but in a prior sense, by being *recognizable*".⁶⁰ For Butler, the question of failure is a question of ontology: the abject beings who failure to count as subject.⁶¹ This is not quite the same as a subject who is already recognized as such whose actions are deemed to be 'out of place' as in the example Duvall and Chowdhury give of Nikita Khrushchev famously banging his shoe at the United Nations.⁶² Neither is it the same as the 'stigmatization' Adler-Nissen describes using both Goffman and Bourdieu's approaches beliefs that certain people should be avoided as they are regarded as polluted, and as a mark of relative social

regardless of audience is useful for pointing out the inconsistencies in the way various scholars have interpreted what 'practices' are, but the intentional/unintentional distinction is resisted by Butler, whose notion of performativity disavows the idea that gender is an intentional practice by a willful agent.

⁵⁸ Charlotte Epstein fluently discusses this constitutive lack in the process of becoming a subject in terms of the structure of the subject in Charlotte Epstein, 'Who Speaks? Discourse, the Subject and the Study of Identity in International Politics,' *European Journal of International Relations* 17:2 (2011), pp. 327-350.

⁵⁹ Butler (1993), p. 188

⁶⁰ Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: The Politics of the Performative* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997a)

⁶¹ see also Lloyd (2007), pp.74-75

⁶² Duvall and Chowdhury (2011), p. 340

position.⁶³ It is failure to be recognized as a subject at all.

‘Failure’ is a theme for other queer theorists as well: Halberstam (2011) and Edelman (2004) have argued that success in heteronormative, capitalist societies too easily equates with particular forms of reproductive maturity, consumption and wealth accumulation. Queer theory has, in recent years, turned to theorizing ‘failure,’ something, as Halberstam quips, “queers do and have always done exceptionally well”.⁶⁴ Queer failure, as Weber notes,⁶⁵ is a figuration rather than a literal strategy; as such queer failure exposes “the limits of certain forms of knowing and certain ways of inhabiting structures of knowledge.”⁶⁶ Failure here suggests the limits of ‘practice turn’ theorizing in IR to take feminist/queer theory seriously and as such, a failure to think its own terms of competency and success. This article’s epigraph, which has served as an inspiration for Halberstam’s work, links failure to bodily ‘styles’ or practices and, given Crisp’s status as queer icon, gender and sexual deviance. Same-sex desire and trans- embodiment are both associated with failure, impossibility and loss.⁶⁷ This is, in Butler’s terms, not only a loss, but also a form of melancholia, the loss that cannot be grieved because it was never recognized as a loss in the first place.⁶⁸ ‘Failure’ to live up to norms of success that discipline behavior can be a source of pleasure, and a way of resisting disciplinary norms. The practice turn as it is currently constituted in IR equates intelligibility with success and therefore ‘incompetent’ practices remain unintelligible. While successful practices of gender may appear to be natural under the domain of the heterosexual matrix, lives and bodies whose practices of gender do not conform to these norms risk failing into the realm of unintelligibility and even inhumanity in their failures.

⁶³ Adler-Nissen (2014)

⁶⁴ Halberstam (2011), p.2

⁶⁵ Weber 2014a

⁶⁶ Halberstam (2011), pp. 11-12; Weber (2015a), p. 37

⁶⁷ Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009)

⁶⁸ Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997b)

What of the bodies that ‘fail’ to practice gender? Butler locates the possibility of change within the possibility of discourse’s failure; that it might be taken received or taken up in ways that are unpredictable (as in the title of her 1997 book *Excitable Speech*). As regulatory regimes are sustained by reiteration, making claims on behalf of abjected or ‘unintelligible’ bodies is part of a way to contest the cultural unintelligibility of certain bodies.⁶⁹ Abjected bodies make themselves felt in culture particularly by contesting and reshaping the terms of cultural intelligibility. The politics of Butler’s theory of performativity is a “politics of insurrection” as Lisa Disch argues.⁷⁰ It is precisely certain *incompetent* practices that fail to properly embody the norms of gender that can call attention to the indeterminant or unstable nature of certain taken-for-granted practices that appear to be natural or self-evident.

Drawing on James C. Scott’s *Seeing Like a State*,⁷¹ Halberstam notes that unintelligibility—failing to be recognized by prevailing power structures—can be a source of political autonomy. Failure to be recognizable or classifiable can be a source of resisting the discipline and hegemonic discourses, as any number of anti-capitalist and subaltern movements can attest to (see also Scott 1987). In literature associated with ‘the practice turn’, Kratochwil’s mention of the potential subversion of technically competent practices may ironically be the closest example of this concept. Kratochwil notes that working ‘by the rule book’ can be an effective means to sabotage and similarly, following ‘best practices’ can be an effective way of avoiding criticism even if the intended goal remains unachieved or the strategies deployed are counter productive.⁷² These type of practices that complicate the relationship between competence and incompetence, success and failure speak to practices of gender embodied by some trans- and gender non-conforming people.

⁶⁹ Butler (1993), p. 191

⁷⁰ Lisa Disch, ‘Judith Butler and the Politics of the Performative,’ *Political Theory* 27:4 (1999), p. 547

⁷¹ James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998)

⁷² Friedrich Kratochwil, ‘Making Sense of ‘International Practices,’ in Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot (eds.), *International Practices*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) p. 40

III. Trans- Bodies as Failures?

An example of bodies that ‘fail’ to be recognized as subjects in IR are trans- and gender non-conforming bodies within biometric practices of security at borders. In the last decade or so, many scholars of international relations, political geography, and related fields have drawn attention to the politics of “biometric borders”⁷³ and the ways in which technological assemblages are used to categorized different bodies at state borders.⁷⁴ In the contemporary post- September 11th security milieu, trans-, genderqueer⁷⁵ and people whose gender presentation fails to conform to expectations, may be considered ‘suspicious bodies,’ their ‘failure’ resulting in risks to personal safety and ‘outing’ but may also be considered a source of resistance to the imperative of regimes of securitization.⁷⁶ As such, airport security practices become a crucial site for revealing the stakes of ‘competence’ in practicing gender. Airport security practices order bodies according to a normative sex/gender regime that casts trans-, genderqueer and gender non-conforming people as threats and unruly bodies. If gender is a kind of bodily practice that creates the illusion of the naturalness of bodily practice, as Butler argues, we are only really made aware of the functioning of gender at the margins, or when gender fails: that is, fails to be convincing. As opposed to failure in many other human endeavors, failure to ‘do’ gender competently does not just make one ‘incompetent’ in some sense, but other or less than human. The violence that trans- and gender queer people regularly suffer (as

⁷³ Louise Amoore, ‘Biometric Borders: Governing Mobilities in the War on Terror,’ *Political Geography* 25: (2006), pp. 336-351

⁷⁴ See *inter alia* Benjamin J. Muller, ‘(Dis)qualified bodies: securitization, citizenship and ‘identity management,’ *Citizenship Studies* 8:3 (2004), pp. 279-294; Charlotte Epstein, ‘Guilty Bodies, Productive Bodies, Destructive Bodies: Crossing the Biometric Border,’ *International Political Sociology* 1:2 (2007), pp. 149-164; Mark Salter, ‘Governmentalities of an Airport: Heterotopia and Confession,’ *International Political Sociology* 1:1 (2007), pp. 49-66; Stephanie Redden and Jillian Terry, ‘The End of the Line: Feminist Understandings of Resistance to Full-Body Scanning Technology,’ *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 15:2 (2012), pp. 234-253; Rocco Bellanova and Gloria Gonzalez Fuster, ‘The Politics of Disappearance: Scanners and (Unobserved) Bodies as Mediators of Security Practice,’ *International Political Sociology* 7:2 (2013), pp. 188-209

⁷⁵ Genderqueer is a term that refers to people who feel that their gender identity is non-binary, that is, not conforming to either masculine or feminine regardless of their sexed embodiment or sexual orientation. Joan Nestle, Clare Howell, and Riki Anne Wilchins, eds. *GenderQueer: Voices from Beyond the Sexual Binary* (Los Angeles: Alyson Publications, 2002).

⁷⁶ There are of course examples of ‘failure’ across all realms of social activity. The focus on feminist/queer theory is to show how any theory of practice necessarily involves a theory of the relationship between the subject and the body, but is also incomplete if it only focuses on behaviors considered to be successful.

well as gay, lesbian, bisexual people or those who are taken to be, which, are often attacked on the basis of *gender* non-conformity according to the dictates of the heterosexual matrix) are a consequence of failing to ‘do’ gender competently. A US Department of Homeland Security memo connected gender presentations that did not ‘match’ one’s bodily morphology based on heteronormative assumptions: “Terrorists will employ novel methods to artfully conceal suicide devices. Male bombers may dress as females in order to discourage scrutiny” (DHS 2003). Airport security assemblages are a site at which a ‘competent’ gender performance renders one as ‘safe’ and an illegible or ‘incompetent’ gender performance can lead to the perception of one as a threat and thus subject to harassment, humiliation and detention.

To understand how success and competence are calibrated requires an understanding of what a ‘successful’ gender practice entails vis-à-vis airport security practices, in particular in the identification requirements. Trans- and gender non-conforming people often do not identify or read as the gender markers on their official identification documents. Procedures for changing the gender marker on one’s identity documents vary around the world and are non-existent in some places. The US passed the REAL ID law in 2005 that enabled comparing identification data across agencies and jurisdictions in an effort to weed out invalid ID or those obtained under false pretenses, which has led to considerable problems for trans- people whose official identification documents are likely to be in more than one gender, say on a passport, birth certificate, or driver’s license.⁷⁷ Security agents also use gender markers to check the identity of the passenger being inspected. The inclusion of “M” and “F” as information about a passenger assumes that this is a permanent feature of the body, as well as that there is an uncomplicated relationship between the sex one is assigned at birth, one’s gender identity, how one’s gender is perceived by others, and the gender classification on

⁷⁷ Dean Spade, Documenting Gender. *Hastings Law Journal* 59 (2008), pp. 731-84

identity documents.⁷⁸ All these elements combine to establish what a ‘competent’ practice of gender entails.⁷⁹ One’s ability to travel, particularly across borders, requires ‘match’ between one’s gender presentation and the sex on one’s official documents, which is by no means an easy or uncomplicated process. Trans- people can be caught in a bureaucratic quagmire trying to change their gender markers, as different jurisdictions and state agencies often have different procedures or requirements. Most commonly, trans- people will be required to have some kind of surgical intervention or medical treatment and be certified by a doctor in order to change their gender marker on official documents.⁸⁰

In addition to the identification document requirements for travel, ability to move across borders increasingly requires being subject to biometric technologies that are not only aimed at ‘securing’ borders but also are also political technologies that draw distinctions between friend/enemy⁸¹ or draw boundaries between the recognizable from the unrecognizable.⁸² One must present one’s body at the border, at which points parts of the body or visualization or data from the body are made to stand in for whole of an identity, whether from photographs on a passport, to fingerprints and iris scanners.⁸³ Such technologies often screen trans- and gender non-conforming

⁷⁸ Paisley Currah and Tara Mulqueen, ‘Securitizing Gender: Identity, Biometrics, and Transgender Bodies at the Airport,’ *Social Research* 78:2 (2011), pp. 557–82

⁷⁹ There are a few exceptions to this: recently, Australia, New Zealand and India have allowed people to have a gender marker “X” on their passports indicating ‘third gender,’ indeterminate or trans- gender status. This does not solve the problem of requiring ‘competent’ gender practices according to the ‘heterosexual matrix’ as trans and intersex and ‘third gender’ people are still frequently harassed and humiliated at airports based on their bodies being considered ‘anomalous’. See for example Lane Sainty, ‘Transgender Passenger Was Forced to Remove Prosthetic by Airport Security.’ *Buzzfeed Australia*, available at: {<http://www.buzzfeed.com/lanesainty/trans-passenger-forced-to-remove-prosthetic#.bkaOpXkvw8>} accessed 7 Jan 2016.

⁸⁰ Currah and Mulqueen (2011); Gayle Salamon, *Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), Dean Spade, *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law* (Brooklyn, NY: South End Press, 2011).

⁸¹ Muller (2004)

⁸² Louise Amoore, *The Politics of Possibility: Risk and Security beyond Probability* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), p. 101.

⁸³ Mark Salter, ‘Passports, Mobility and Security: How Smart Can the Border Be?’ *International Studies Perspectives* 5 (2004), pp. 71-9; Peter Adey, ‘Facing Airport Security: Affect, Biopolitics and the Preemptive Securitisation of the Mobile Body,’ *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 27 (2009), p. 277.

people as ‘anomalous’ or ‘suspicious,’ reinforcing the unintelligibility of gender practices outside of a ‘heterosexual matrix’. Biometrics technologies rely upon human programming of attributes: what counts as ‘normal’ embodiment is inscribed in devices, algorithms and the practices that surround their use.⁸⁴ Of particular interest is the use of ‘full-body’ scanners, used throughout airports in the US as well as in the UK, Australia, Thailand, Canada, Europe and Japan, among other places. While the algorithms used in biometric technologies such as facial recognition are proprietary, the underlying science uses human perceptions of the racial/gender identities of persons to teach computers about differences, including the use of such traits as hair style and clothing to indicate gender.⁸⁵ The full-body scanners used to produce images of the human body akin to a hospital x-ray that was screened by trained personal in a separate room from the space where travelers were screened. Following controversy over the explicit nature of the images produced and privacy concerns, software known as ‘ProVision ATD’ (for ‘automatic threat detection’) was developed to ‘read’ the images for signs of anomaly, presenting to the human security agents an image of the outline of an un-sexed human form. However, the practice of screening individuals relies upon a security agent pressing a pink or a blue button, signifying whether they believe the person about to be screened presents as a woman or a man. This indicates that the software is set to define bodily anomalies differently for men and women based on pre-programmed parameters for bodily morphology that assumes a coherence between the gender a person is perceived as and how the software algorithm will interpret an image of their body as belonging to either a man or a woman.

⁸⁴ Shoshona Amielle Magnet, *When Biometrics Fail: Gender, Race and the Technology of Identity*. (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Govert Valkenburg and Irma van der Ploeg, ‘Materialities between Security and Privacy: A Constructivist Account of Airport Security Scanners,’ *Security Dialogue* 46:4 (2015), pp. 326-344; Wilcox (2015), pp. 104-130

⁸⁵ Joseph Pugliese, *Biometrics: Bodies, Technologies, Biopolitics* (New York and London: Routledge, 2010); Magnet, (2011), p. 42

Figure 1: (image from <http://www.sds.l-3com.com/advancedimaging/provision-at.htm>)

The combination of state-agency regulated gender markers on identification documents and ‘body scanners’ present well-documented difficulties for trans- and gender non-conforming people⁸⁶ (see also, Sjoberg and Shepherd 2012; Sjoberg 2014, 85-90; Bohling 2012, 2014; Costello 2012, 2016; Clarkson 2014; Wilcox 2015, 104-130). Cary Gabriel Costello, for example, has written about his repeated detentions, invasive searches, and missed flights despite assurances of the US Transport Security Administration that their procedures are trans- friendly. He has been singled out on the basis of ‘anomalies’ that appear on scanners due to his wearing a chest binder. His daughter has also been subject to enhanced searches officials mistakenly thought she was trans- as well (Costello 2016). Writer Shadi Petosky, a trans-woman, live-tweeted her harassment and detention when she was flagged for an ‘anomaly’ in the body- scanners, even after she explained she was transgender. “I’m in trouble if they push a button that doesn’t fit” (Rogers 2015). Furthermore, competently practicing gender in airports also has a racialized component: black women are subjected to higher level security screenings at nine times the rate of white women, despite being half as likely to be caught with contraband, while women with ‘natural’ or ‘Afro’ style hair are frequently subjected to having their hair ‘patted down’ despite not having set off any alarms or any other signs of ‘suspiciousness’ in US airport security screening procedures.⁸⁷ As such, competently practicing

⁸⁶ See also Laura J. Shepherd, and Laura Sjoberg, ‘Trans- Bodies In/of War(s): Cisprivilege and Contemporary Security Strategy,’ *Feminist Review* 101:1 (2012), pp. 5–23; Laura Sjoberg, *Gendering Global Conflict: Toward a Feminist Theory of War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); Alissa Bohling, ‘Exclusive: Transgender travelers singled out in TSA screenings, docs show,’ *Al Jazeera America*. 26 May 2014 Available at <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/5/26/groin-anomalies-andpatdownstravelingwhiletrans.html>, Costello, Cary Gabriel. (2012) TSA Body Screening and the Trans Body. *Transfusion*. March 25 <http://transfusion.blogspot.co.uk/2012/03/tsa-body-scanning-and-trans-body.html>. Costello, Cary Gabriel. (2016) Traveling While Trans: The False Promise of Better Treatment *Transfusion*. January 3. <http://transfusion.blogspot.co.uk/2016/01/traveling-while-trans-false-promise-of.html>. Accessed 10 January 2016.

⁸⁷ Simone Browne, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), p. 132

gender in airport security practices also means conforming to ideas about what proper gender looks that are grounded in ideals of whiteness, class privilege, and heterosexuality.⁸⁸

The experiences of trans- and gender-nonconforming people in airport security practices show the perils of theorizing practices in terms of ‘competence’. If we only recognized ‘competent’ practices, we are only recognizing those who are already intelligible, already considered competent actors. We are looking only at the general version of ‘trusted travelers’⁸⁹ in International Relations or at least those who are deemed ‘competent’ actors at the expense of reifying existing relations of exclusion and marginality of which normative gendered embodiment is only one. The ‘mismatch’ between embodiment and gender presentation presents a form of failure in airport security practices, one that demonstrates possible consequences of incompetent practices: being branded as a threat, harassment, humiliation and detention.

As a final point about the stakes of competence in terms of gender, even the subject of ‘trans-’ can be complicated as matter of success or failure in light of queer theory and queer gender practices. As Meghana Nayak notes in relation to US asylum law, there is an expectation that trans-people are either anatomically male with a stereotypical female identity and gender expression in terms of behavior, appearance, and dress, or they are anatomically female with stereotypically male identity and gender expression,⁹⁰ similar arguments have also been made about Turkish and British

⁸⁸ See also Beauchamp (2009)

⁸⁹ The United States offers expedited service at the border for “pre-approved, low-risk” travelers as part of their “trusted traveler” network, including “Global Entry” or “Nexus.” Such travelers avoid long lines by using kiosks to scan their fingerprints and passports. “Trusted Travelers” in the US can also apply to TSA Pre Check, a service to expedite security screenings (not have to remove shoes, belts, jackets or laptops). US and Dutch citizens are eligible for a similar program “FLUX” or “Privium” in Canada. Other examples of states giving special treatment at the borders to ‘trusted travelers’ include “Registered Travellers” in the UK, Mexico’s “Viajero Confiable,” “Automatic Gate” in Japan, “Smart Gate” in Australia and New Zealand, “e-gate” in Hong Kong, and the Republic of Korea’s “Smart Entry Service.” Such programs promise faster crossings for pre-approved travellers from certain countries, often linked to providing biometric readings in advance.

⁹⁰ Nayak 2015:152);

asylum law.⁹¹ A gender performance of a self-identified trans- person that is ‘competent’ according to the gender regulations of the state and the heterosexual matrix (a person whose gender marker has been legally changed, who has had medical and surgical interventions and whose bodily performances are regularly ‘read’ as those of a particular sex/gender) would in all likelihood be considered normatively gendered rather than ambiguous or trans-, regardless of how he or she identifies, and therefore such a person may be considered a “trusted traveler”. Such trans- people include those considered to ‘pass’ as members of the gender they identify with. The US-based National Transgender Advocacy Coalition advocates a strategy Toby Beauchamp has labeled “strategic visibility” which includes carrying paperwork, documenting one’s surgeries and disclosing to security agent’s one’s status as trans-.⁹² The category of trans- in this situation serves as a regulatory category, a status that one must conform to access certain rights and services. Failure to be a ‘good trans-’ subject, as most trans- and genderqueer people are (most people who identify as trans- do not pursue surgical modifications) results in becoming aligned with terrorists and other suspicious or monstrous bodies. As Beauchamp notes, “not every transgender body will be perceived as deviant and troubling. Indeed, the dangerously mobile body may well be not that which abides by medicolegal regulations [of trans- subjects] but that which exceeds or eludes them”.⁹³

The development of trans- as potentially a regulatory category of which one can measure success or failure at is not only a matter of controversy within trans- communities,⁹⁴ but speaks to

⁹¹ (Shakhsari 2013; Lewis 2014). Shakhsari, Sima. (2013) Shuttling Between Bodies and Borders: Iranian Transsexual Refugees and the Politics of Rightful Killing. In *The Transgender Reader 2*, edited by Susan Stryker and Aren Z. Aizura. 565-580. London and New York: Routledge; Lewis, Rachel. (2014) "Gay? Prove it": The Politics of Queer Anti-Deportation Activism *Sexualities* 17 (8): 958-975.

⁹² Toby Beauchamp, ‘Artful Concealment and Strategic Visibility: Transgender Bodies and U.S. State Surveillance After 9/11,’ *Surveillance and Society* 6:4 (2009), pp. 356-366.

⁹³ Toby Beauchamp, ‘The Substance of Borders: Transgender Politics, Mobility, and the US Regulation of Testosterone,’ *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 19:1 (2012), pp. 57-78.

⁹⁴ Katrina Roen discusses a tension in trans- politics as ‘both/neither’ versus ‘either/or’ in which some trans- people take a position of refusal to fit within categories of man and woman while ‘either/or’ refers to the imperative by some trans-

broader question of queer theory in International Relations. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick influentially suggested that the designation ‘queer’ could apply to “[t]he ...excesses of meaning when the constituent element of anyone’s gender, or anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or *can’t be* made) to signify monolithically.”⁹⁵ Moving from a singular ‘either/or’ to a multiple ‘and/or’ frame can help us understand the pluralities of sex, gender and sexuality that can be described as ‘queer’ (Weber 2015b). Rather than being either a man or a woman, or, I might add, a success or a failure in a binary way, one can be both a man *and* a woman in terms of different categorizations of documents, the ways one is read by others, one’s self-identity, technological algorithms, and more, as well as being either/or a man or a woman at the same time. For Weber, the plural “and/or” framework “can require us to appreciate how a person or a thing is constituted by and simultaneously embodies multiple, seemingly contradictory meanings that may confuse and confound a simple either/or dichotomy.”⁹⁶

Depending on one’s gender identity, sexual orientation, gender presentations, gender markers on various documents, and bodily morphology, in the airport security practices, trans- and gender non-conforming people may be read as men or women, or as both men *and* women. Certain trans- practices of embodiment could be considered, on one hand, either a success or a failure: their gender could be seen as an ‘incompetent’ practice of gender that marked them as a security threat, even if they are ‘competently’ practicing ‘trans-’ embodiment in terms of making themselves “strategically visible,” identifying themselves as trans- to security personal, and carrying doctor’s notes about surgical procedures or hormone treatments. According to the practices of airport security, being a trans-, genderqueer or gender non-conforming person can mean embodying

people to pass convincingly as either a man or a woman (Roen 2002). Weber’s articulation of ‘and/or’ logic may be said to encompass both of these positions (2015b).

⁹⁵ Sedgwick (1993), p. 8

⁹⁶ Weber (2015b), p. 9

gender/sexuality in a way that is successful (as in one conforming to normative standards around embodying ‘trans-’) or a failure (one’s embodiment confounds the gender norms of security personnel and ‘body scanners’, leading one to be treated as a terrorist threat) but could also be read as both a success and a failure: a failure to practice racialized, heteronormative gender norms, but possibly contributing to the successful exposure and undermining of those very norms that govern the intelligibility of bodies. In a piece considered to be a foundational work of transgender studies, Sandy Stone draws upon Butler’s work to articulate the *genre* of the transsexual (not necessarily any individual person) as “a set of embodied texts whose potential for the *productive* disruption of structures of sexuality and spectra of desire has yet to be explored” (Stone 1997[1991]:352 emphasis in original). The existence of ‘trans-’ as a category, embodied by trans- people demanding their own intelligibility as subjects, brings with it the possibilities for disturbing assumptions about what it means to practice gender apart from the heteronormative norms of sex, gender and desire contained within strictly ‘competent’ practices of gender.

Conclusion

The explicit focus on theorizing ‘practices’ in recent years can open windows into some of the foundational assumptions of IR theory. Dominant ways of thinking about practices in International Relations do more than inadvertently erase the experiences of marginalized populations such as trans-, genderqueer and gender non-conforming people; they are limited in thinking about the significance of different kinds of practices for making and unmaking subjects. Taking seriously contributions from feminist/queer theorists to theorizing gender as a practice are necessary in order to redress the neglect of certain bodies and certain lives in IR theory, such as those whose gendered practices and identities are not considered ‘competent’ or at least have a complicated relationship to heteronormative standards of practicing gender. Reading the experiences of trans- and gender non-conforming people in navigating airport security practices reveals the

violence inherent in normative conceptions of sex and gender and embodiment for the kinds of subjects that can be recognized as such, as well as the kinds of theory that can be recognized as intelligible in IR.

Despite the occasional citation of Butler as an influence in ‘the practice turn’ in IR, the use of feminist/queer theory in this regard amounts to what Cynthia Weber described as ‘gentrification’ in IR theory (2015a): assimilating the distinctiveness of this approach to practices of embodiment to a homogenized, catch-all category with its critical impetus stripped out. Theorizing gender as a practice from the perspective of queer theories and/or queer practices that enact gender in multiple and diverse ways is about much more than seeing actors or variables that were not otherwise visible to International Relations theory; it is about a fundamental rethinking of the practices of theory in IR that neglect feminist and/or queer theories, or at best, ‘gentrify’ them by flattening out key theoretical and political differences to be one of many under a diverse (heteronormative) “family” of practice theorists.⁹⁷ Attempts to establish a broad school of ‘practice theory’ in IR that attempts to replace heterogeneity with assimilation has the effect of driving out people and theories marked by difference, assimilating and replacing them with watered-down versions that reproduced existing hierarchies of disciplinary ‘competence’. Including Butler, however briefly, as a theorist that can be assimilated into a pre-existing work on ‘practices’ without taking seriously the challenges that feminist/queer theory poses at underlying assumptions around gender, sexuality, and embodiment and the stakes and possibilities of failure and incompetence risks repositioning feminist/queer work as ‘failures’ in IR that can only be resuscitated through their association with more respectable, ‘competent’ work. Neglect of the ways in which feminist/queer scholars have interrogated gender as

⁹⁷ Bueger and Gadinger (2015), p.2

a practice radically distorts what taking practices seriously in IR might mean, as well as reproducing (hetero)normative standards of being a competent “trusted traveler” in practices of IR theory.

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